

# 2024 Nebraska Senate race: A cesspool of political reaction

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The US presidential election is taking place amid an escalation of global war and the open threat of dictatorship, something which has been acknowledged by Donald Trump's former defense secretary, who admitted Trump "wanted generals like Hitler's," i.e., those who would follow any orders given, including orders to use the military against domestic opposition.

Vice President Kamala Harris has acknowledged this threat, but stepped up her calls for bipartisanship in pursuit of American imperialism's predatory wars abroad. In its genocide in Gaza, Israel is armed to the teeth by both capitalist parties and with the full support of both Trump and Harris. Preparations are well underway by the outgoing Biden-Harris administration for a US-Israeli war against Iran, with US air defense batteries already deployed to Israel.

Meanwhile, the Biden-Harris administration is overseeing a massive attack on free speech and victimization of students, faculty and staff at campuses across the country who oppose the genocide against the Palestinian people.

This is the context within which the US senatorial race in Nebraska is taking place. The contest is between two right-wing candidates: Deb Fischer, a Republican favored by Trump who has held the seat since 2013, and Dan Osborn, an independent, who was the president of Local 50G of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM) in Omaha, and who is himself seeking to appeal to Trump supporters.

The race, which is neck to neck according to the latest *New York Times*/Siena poll, could determine if Republicans have a majority in the Senate, as Democrats are projected to lose incumbent seats in West Virginia and Montana. Osborn has said he will not caucus with either party if he is elected.

Fischer opposes abortion, refuses to recognize man-made climate change, and supported the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. She also supports the Gaza genocide and the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, voting for \$61 billion in May for the war. Fischer has a significant financial lead over Osborn from corporate political action committees.

Osborn has been endorsed by a substantial section of the trade union bureaucracy, including the United Auto Workers (UAW), the United Steel Workers, the Nebraska State AFL-CIO, and the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS), among others. He has received the highest total in donations from the unions among the senatorial candidates. UAW President Shawn Fain has been among the most prominent union bureaucrats to stump for Osborn on the campaign trail.

All of the above-listed unions have collaborated in the destruction of their own members' jobs. The UAW sold out autoworkers after forcing through what it called a "record" 2023 contract, which paved the way for mass layoffs. The BRS played a key role in selling out rail workers in 2022, helping delay a strike until the Biden administration and both capitalist parties in Congress passed legislation banning a strike and imposing a sellout agreement that the workers had rejected.

*Labor Notes* and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which have effectively endorsed Osborn, played a key role in a number of these sellouts, including of autoworkers and railway workers, promoting illusions and covering for the the UAW and BRS bureaucracies.

Osborn himself sold out a strike by Kellogg workers in 2021, leading to the planned shutdown of the company's Omaha plant by the end of 2026 and destruction of 550 jobs.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote when the closure was announced earlier this year, Osborn said he didn't believe the plant closure was payback by the company for the strike, in essence because the deal he negotiated was so poor. He said at the time: "That contract that we had at the end of the strike wasn't very lucrative in the fact that we didn't get huge bonuses like they did at John Deere. We basically preserved what we had."

Osborn has attacked Fischer from the right, running an attack ad that features people declaring they would be voting for Trump and Osborn, while text on the screen shows a quote attributed to Fischer in 2016 calling for Trump to "step aside." The ad goes on to say that Osborn was "with Trump" on being "tough on China, the border, and draining the swamp," and claiming Fischer had more in common with Hillary Clinton than with Trump.

Another advertisement by Osborn's main super PAC argues that Osborn is the "only real conservative in the race," attacking Fischer from the right for not supporting Trump's border policy and putting forward Osborn as a more consistent supporter of austerity, in addition to bluster about supporting family farms. His campaign website further blames "illegal immigration" for the destruction of jobs, and "multinationals" for the tax burden on workers and the middle class. It also attacks funding for COVID-19 vaccines in language interchangeable with Trump's campaign.

Trump is backing Fischer. In a campaign ad, Trump attacks Osborn as "a radical left person" and a "Bernie Sanders type Democrat," ending with the narrator calling Osborn a "Democrat in disguise." A graphic in the ad quotes Osborn as saying, "I love Bernie."

*Jacobin* and *Labor Notes* have promoted Osborn's right-wing campaign as a strategy for the Democratic Party where its "brand is toxic."

It wrote:

Could Sanders and labor even come together to run independent labor candidates for Senate in red states, where the Democrats' party brand is toxic? That's what the union steamfitter Dan Osborn is trying in Nebraska this year... US politics would look very different if Sanders were joined in the Senate by even a small

plant handful of labor-backed independents from red states.

The Democrats are so discredited in Nebraska and other "red states" that they have virtually given up contesting the elections. This is because of their role in gutting jobs over the past 40 years, with Democrats presiding over the deindustrialization of America along with the Republicans, and allocating an ever greater share of society's resources to bailouts of the financial oligarchy and war. The last Democrat elected to the US Senate from Nebraska was Ben Nelson, who served from 2001 until 2012, after the Obama administration's bailout of the financial oligarchy and restructuring of the auto industry, involving massive pay cuts and the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs. This was alongside Obama's continuation of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

There is no guarantee that Osborn, a Democrat until 2016, who rejected the Democrats' endorsement, would caucus with them. If elected, he could follow the example of Teamsters President Sean O'Brien, who, after being praised by *Jacobin* and the DSA, met with Trump and spoke at the Republican National Convention. Some newspapers have correctly pointed out that Osborn could be the next Joe Manchin—the former Democratic, now independent Senator from West Virginia—but, it must be added, an even more right-wing version.



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