



NOTABLE EVENTS

- * **SUDANESE REFERENDUM FOR INDEPENDENCE:** Thursday, Dec. 2, 7 p.m., Harper Center, 2500 California St. Local Sudanese leaders talk about issues facing the African nation. Creighton.edu
- * **9500 LIBERTY SCREENING:** Friday, Dec. 3, 7 p.m., Metro Community College, 2909 Edward Babe Gomez Ave. Screening and discussion of immigration policy documentary. 889.8410
- * **DIVERSITY TRAINING FOR PUBLIC SERVANTS:** Tuesday, Dec. 7, 7 p.m., The Attic, 33rd and Harney. UNMC Professor Chris Fisher offers insight on working with Omaha's GLBT youth. 345.5423

Putting Up a Fight

As Omaha's recall battle heats up, Mayor Suttle enters the fray

by Brandon Vogel

He isn't resigning — we know that much. But whether or not Mayor Jim Suttle will actually face a recall election is still being decided in Douglas County courtrooms and counting rooms.

It appeared we would know on Dec. 4 if Suttle would face the second recall election in the city's history. That's the end of the mandatory 15-day period that the Douglas County Election Commission has to validate nearly 37,600 signatures submitted Nov. 19 by the Mayor Suttle Recall Committee. The group would need 26,643 valid signatures from registered Omaha voters to force a special election early next year.

But that timeline is now in question. Suttle filed an injunction request with the Douglas County District Court on Nov. 24, asking for a 75-day window to comb through the nearly 3,000 petitions.

"The 15 days is wholly inadequate for the plaintiff to protect his rights as an elected official," Suttle wrote in the court filing. District Judge Peter Bataillon is scheduled to hear the case Dec. 1.

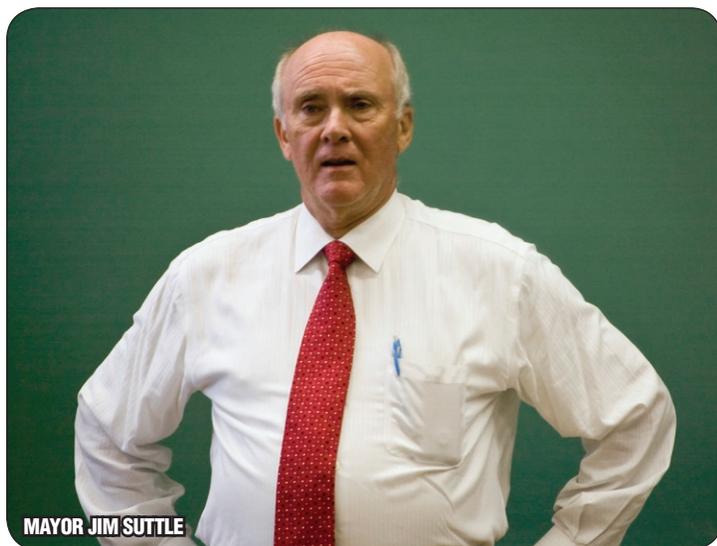
Forward Omaha, an anti-recall group, has obtained its own copies of the petitions and has spent the past week poring over the documents looking

for inaccuracies. Noelle Obermeyer, co-treasurer for the group, says there's plenty of cause for concern.

"We're not being nit-picky, but we're pulling out whole petitions that are questionable," she says. "There is no way you wouldn't want to question this."

Mayor Suttle Recall Committee spokesperson Jeremy Aspen has repeatedly said the group complied with all city and state laws during the petition process, but Obermeyer says her group would consider further legal action if the injunction isn't granted.

"Circulators had no problem telling our cameras that they were being paid by the signature," Obermeyer says. The city prohibits paying petition circulators for each signature. "There are outright



MAYOR JIM SUTTLE

BRANDON VOGEL

and blatant irregularities, and we don't know if the election commission has the ability to look at all this information."

Omaha has been down this road before. About 35,000 people signed a petition that led to Mayor Mike Boyle being recalled in 1986. A 2008 attempt to recall Mayor Hal Daub failed when petitioners didn't collect enough signatures to force a vote.

Since taking office in 2009, Suttle has been the target of three other recall inquiries. Leading

up to the 2010 budget hearings, the mayor said he wouldn't "kick the can down the road," arguing that his predecessors had ignored Omaha's growing budget shortfall that stood at \$4.7 million in August. To reduce it, Suttle approved a budget that included a \$50 wheel tax increase for residents and commuters, a new 2.5 percent tax on restaurants and bar tabs, and, for the second-consecutive year, a property increase.

The tax hikes weren't popular.

If this recall effort is successful, Omaha would become the first city of its size to remove two mayors from office.

Paul Landow, a political science professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, doesn't think that history makes Omaha particularly recall-happy. He says this recall effort reflects a national trend of American citizens' dissatisfaction with politicians because of the floundering economy, high unemployment rates and two divisive foreign wars.

"The recall effort shows Omaha is no exception," he says. "While the mayor's personality may have played a role, the main issue is tax increases. And the lesson is simple — adding new taxes and increasing those already on the books is a difficult sell in good times, but impossible in today's economy."

"Omahans are fair-minded and reasonable, but they have limits, and those limits have apparently been reached."

Suttle acknowledged that personality conflict in a Thanksgiving message posted to YouTube on Nov. 24. Sitting alongside his wife, Deb, Suttle says in the video, "Even though I'm a keep-your-nose-to-the-grindstone kind of guy, I will do a better job of letting you know how we have been providing city services that operate efficiently, how we are working to make you feel safer in your neighborhoods, and how we are improving economic development, finding those job opportunities for employment so our city can continue to be the best place for you and your family to live."

With the video having been viewed only 450 times as of Nov. 30, the question is whether or not Omaha is still listening.

Focusing on immigrant families already here

UPFRONT

The creators of *When We Stop Counting* aren't interested in a discussion on immigration law enforcement — the documentary is the real-life drama of six Latino students in Crete's public schools, set against a backdrop of their lives as first-generation Americans or immigrants.

But it's also about a school system faced with staggering population changes. In about a decade, Crete's public schools have gone from almost no minorities to a 50 percent Latino student population. Co-filmmaker Elisabeth Reinkordt, video production and multimedia specialist at the Nebraska Department of Education, wants the documentary to re-frame the immigration debate by showing how Crete rose to the occasion.

"The more eyes that see it, the better" says Brent Meier, formerly of Lincoln community agency El Centro de Las Americas. He collaborated with Reinkordt on the project. They poured countless hours into assembling the grant-funded documentary, and while it elaborates on Crete's successes, Meier says the students represent the film's heart.

Each armed with a camera, the six students documented an entire school year through graduation day, which Meier and Reinkordt spliced together with commentary about Crete's school system.

In the students' raw footage, the filmmakers found a wealth of drama and challenges as these students shared their surprises and setbacks, and grew into capable filmmakers in their own right.

Reinkordt recalls one particular student's experience at a border crossing into Mexico. On a family trip to visit his father, the young man's mother was forced to bribe a Mexican border guard to secure passage for his younger sister, an American citizen.

The boy pulled out his camera and started taping, she says, narrating for the camera. This kind of corruption was one of the reasons his family wanted to get out of Mexico in the first place.

"What he's experiencing on a personal level deals with a much broader issue," Reinkordt says. It shows something not only about him, but about his realization that there's power in telling these stories.

The documentary also showcases what Crete did to help these students become part of the school community. The school reached out to Farmland Foods, the meat supplier that drew Latino immigrants to Crete in the first place, to set up adult GED and English classes.

Ideally, the film will put a human face on a heavily politicized topic, Meier says: "We don't need any more negative press on the immigration issue."

When We Stop Counting airs at Lincoln's Indigo Bridge bookstore, 701 P St. at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 9.

— Laura Schreier

HARPER'S INDEX



NUMBERS GAME:

- ✓ Net domestic profits earned by U.S. corporations since the fourth quarter of 2008: **\$609 billion**
- ✓ Net decrease since then in the amount these companies spent on wages and benefits: **-\$171 billion**
- ✓ Average value of the 2009 salary and benefits paid to private-sector and federal workers, respectively: **\$61,050, \$115,182**

THEY SAID IT



BEN BACKS BARACK: "With many Americans suffering and not having jobs, worried about losing their jobs, we all have to share the sacrifice." — *Sen. Ben Nelson to Talking Points Memo on his support of President Barack Obama's proposal to freeze federal pay until 2012. He said he supports extending tax cuts, but not unemployment benefits. Nelson's net worth is between \$8 million and more than \$16.6 million, according to OpenSecrets.org.*