

BREAKING BRAD



On Memorial Day weekend I sat in one spot and **did not move**. Unfortunately, that spot was in the Zorinsky Lake parking lot.

Over the three-day weekend, Omahans flocked to see a replica of **Sue the Tyrannosaurus rex** on display at the Durham Museum. T. rex roamed the earth 67 million years ago. To put that in perspective, it's the length of two NBA playoffs.

To set up the Sue replica required a detailed, **painstaking process** to assemble thousands of fragments. But even the guy in charge of this has an unassembled IKEA couch sitting in a box in his living room.

Gov. Dave Heineman announced **he will not run** for the open Senate seat from Nebraska. This will allow him to spend more time with his loved ones — the other three guys in his regular golf foursome.

Heineman said a run for U.S. Senate **would distract him** from his real priorities — breaking 80 and eliminating his slice.

For Brad's latest musings, go to Omaha.com/Dickson

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Midlands, Page 5B

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LOTTERIES

POWERBALL

Saturday, May 25: 2-6-19-21-27. **Powerball:** 25. Three winning tickets for \$50 million jackpot sold in Delaware, Florida and Louisiana. **Jackpot for Wednesday, May 29:** \$40 million.

MEGA MILLIONS

Friday, May 24: 4-5-16-18-53. **Megaball:** 28. **Megaplier:** 4. No jackpot ticket sold. **Jackpot for Tuesday, May 28:** \$23 million.

NEBRASKA

Pick 5 — Monday, May 27: 1-5-15-17-33. No jackpot winner. **Jackpot for Tuesday, May 28:** \$82,000.

MyDaY — Monday, May 27: 10-7-94

2by2 — Monday, May 27: red 7-17; white 2-5.

Pick 3 — Monday, May 27: 1-1-0.

IOWA

Cash Game — Monday, May 27: 3-9-11-15-29.

Hot Lotto — Saturday, May 25: 10-11-16-26-35. **Hot Ball:** 8.

Pick 3 — Monday, May 27: midday 4-0-1; evening 9-7-5.

Pick 4 — Monday, May 27: midday 8-6-9-6; evening 7-4-1-4.

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Omaha World-Herald

Omaha Daily Herald founded 1865
Omaha Daily World founded 1885
World-Herald 1889

(USPS 408-280)
Published daily except Sunday at the Omaha World-Herald Building, 1314 Douglas St., Omaha, NE 68102-1811 402-444-1000

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Periodical postage paid at Omaha, Neb., and at other mailing offices. Basic weekly home delivery subscription rates, \$4.45 daily and Sunday, \$2.20 Monday-Saturday, \$1.75 Monday-Friday, \$3.05 Friday, Saturday and Sunday, \$2.25 Sunday. Single copy rates are \$0.75 daily and \$2.50 Sunday. Fifty-two week mail subscription rates in surrounding counties are \$154.44 daily, \$117.00 Sunday only, \$268.84 daily and Sunday. For other rates, please contact us at 1-800-234-6942 or CirculationCustomerService@owh.com. Both the weekend and Sunday-only home delivery subscriptions include delivery on the following 2013 holidays: New Year's Day 1/1/2013, President's Day 2/18/2013, Memorial Day 5/27/2013, Independence Day 7/4/2013, Labor Day 9/2/2013, Columbus Day 10/14/2013, Veterans Day 11/11/2013, Thanksgiving 11/28/2013 and 11/29/2013, and Christmas 12/25/2013.

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Postmaster: Send change of address to Omaha World-Herald, the Omaha World-Herald Building, 1314 Douglas St., Suite 800, Omaha, NE 68102-1811.

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May 28, 2013
Vol. 148, Edition 202

Legislature: Some see divisive issues behind rise of filibusters

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partisan politics, a shift to more moderates in the body and term limits, which they say leads lawmakers to focus more on short-term victories than long-term policy.

"We really are looking more and more like (the U.S.) Congress," said veteran Lincoln lobbyist Walt Radcliffe. "I don't think that's anything anyone would want to emulate."

Others, though, say the rise in the use of filibusters simply reflects the divisive issues being debated this year.

"It's sort of become the myth of this session that everything is being filibustered," said Omaha Sen. Scott Lautenbaugh. "It just depends on what issues come out on the floor."

A classic filibuster lasts eight hours, but several times senators also bogged down debate with talk-fests on nonserious amendments.

So far this year, six cloture motions have been filed to end debate. Such motions require 33 votes. The 2013 session has had the most cloture votes since 11 were logged in 2006.

In addition, a number of bills have been blocked by just the threat of a filibuster. Supporters of Medicaid expansion, for example, allowed their bill to be dropped when they sensed they didn't have enough votes to end debate. In that instance, a group of at least 17 senators signed a letter pledging their opposition to the bill. That number, 17, is

significant because it would be just enough to block a cloture motion.

Some lawmakers said it was unprecedented that such a "petition" was used to block legislation. Others said it was appropriate because the bill wasn't going anywhere unless supporters could find 33 votes. It was simply a way opponents could show they had at least 17 senators opposing it.

Lincoln Sen. Kathy Campbell, the main sponsor of the Medicaid expansion bill, said that it's an unfortunate trend if every bill needs 33 votes to advance instead of a simple majority.

That, Campbell said, changes the focus from "working out the best policy" to gaining a supermajority.

"In the long run, that hurts the policy of the state," she said.

The officially nonpartisan Legislature, Campbell said, seems more polarized this year, with more senators on the far right and far left who are unwilling to compromise.

"Maybe the Legislature is a little bit more reflective of what we see across the country," she said, although adding: "There's a lot of variables here. It's hard to point to one of them."

Several senators blamed the dysfunction on a turnover of leadership in the Legislature and the election of 11 new senators who, as a group, are more moderate than their predecessors. Others said it takes time

to form coalitions, pointing to the three years it took to put together a supermajority to push through a law allowing taxpayer-paid prenatal services for the babies of illegal immigrants.

Conservatives lost key leaders to term limits this year, such as Sens. Mike Flood, Deb Fischer, Lavon Heidemann and Chris Langemeier. Lacking the numbers to pass conservative legislation, they've been forced to adopt defensive strategies to stop legislation they oppose.

The return of Chambers, who served 38 years in the one-house Legislature before being forced out by term limits in 2008, has been a big factor.

Filibusters dropped markedly during the four years he was sitting out, from 2009 to 2012. Some senators said other lawmakers have learned by watching Chambers how to effectively kill a bill through a filibuster or by using motions to talk about other matters.

Tuesday was a good example. Chambers consumed a morning of debate, venting on everything from the blocking of the Medicaid expansion bill to his views on the Catholic Church.

The extended debate delayed a vote on a well-supported bill to give state judges a pay raise. It also made it less likely that other bills further down the agenda will come up for debate during the session's last two weeks. Running out the clock can be a powerful tool.

"Ernie has shaped this ses-

sion. He has set the agenda," Radcliffe said.

Last week, Chambers and Lautenbaugh, a conservative leader in the Legislature, traded verbal jabs on the floor over who was obstructing progress in advancing legislation this year.

Chambers blamed the conservative bloc, which he called "the clack," and Lautenbaugh responded that it all depended on "whose ox is being gored."

Radcliffe, the veteran lobbyist, blames term limits for the rise in filibusters. He said that since senators can serve only two consecutive, four-year terms, their thinking is shorter term and focused more on personal agendas than what's best for the state in the long run.

Controversial issues used to pass with 25 votes, Radcliffe said, but no longer.

"Continuity is not something the Legislature embraces anymore," he said.

The frustration over legislative dysfunction has led to renewed talk about lowering the number of votes needed to stop a filibuster from 33 to 30 votes. That would be the same number of votes required to override a veto by the governor.

Lincoln Sen. Bill Avery, a retired political science professor, said that such a change would be a two-edged sword. Filibusters are used by the minority to thwart the majority, but today's minority might be tomorrow's majority, he said.

"Be careful what you do with the rules," Avery said.

Janssen said one of his bills that was blocked — a measure to require voters to present picture IDs before voting — would be the law if only 30 votes were needed to stop a filibuster last year. Thirty votes might have been enough to repeal the death penalty and expand Medicaid this year as well.

Sen. Greg Adams of York, the speaker of the Legislature, said that overall, 2013 has been a frustrating session, in part because of the increased number of filibusters.

He said that his main job as speaker is to ensure that the priority issues of the Legislature get a full and fair debate. Adams, in his first year as speaker, said he may have fallen short of his personal goals in that regard. The Legislature had debated 82 percent of all priority bills through last week.

Overall, Adams said, more factions within the Legislature may be willing to resort to the filibuster than in the past, but it's within the rules.

"From my personal perspective, I understand the rule. I would prefer more of these things come to a straight up-or-down vote," he said. "(But) when people feel passionate about an issue, they're more willing to resort to more extreme measures like the filibuster to stop legislation."

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Go online to view valuations or order custom reports on Curbwise.com. The site makes it easier for homeowners to compare valuations. A custom report could help a property owner file a valuation protest.

Valuations: Douglas assessor can't yet justify widespread boosts

Continued from Page 1

The valuation information for both counties also is available now on The World-Herald website Curbwise.com.

Starting in June, property owners can appeal their valuations to their County Board of Equalization, regardless of whether the valuations have been increased this year. Thousands of property owners each year file protests, and usually more than half win reductions.

Whether the assessor reduces a valuation of a house or a property owner wins an appeal, lower valuations can mean lower property taxes for homeowners. Tax bills are calculated by multiplying the valuation by the tax rate. If local governments hold tax rates unchanged, the result will be a smaller tax bill for everyone who obtains a valuation cut.

Conversely, people with valuation hikes probably will pay higher property taxes. Newly elected Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert is in that boat after a reappraisal that boosted valuations in her St. Andrews Pointe neighborhood near 120th and Q Streets. Her valuation is going up \$34,800 to \$427,400 — a smaller increase than most neighborhood residents — and could raise her tax bill about \$700.

Besides affecting individual property owners, valuations also may have an impact on local governments. Stagnant or shrinking valuations often put pressure on budgets, forcing spending cuts or leading to higher tax rates.

All told, Douglas County's tax base, including commercial property, farmland and new house construction, is set to rise slightly in 2013, said County Assessor Roger Morrissey, depending on the outcome of Board of Equalization protests. But the gain — about 1 percent — is much less than the gain in the mid-2000s.

In Sarpy, the tax base is expected to increase about 2 percent, which is below the double-digit hikes of past years.

Morrissey said the housing market may be healthier now than it was a few years ago, with new construction and a recent boost in the sales of higher-end houses. But he said there's not enough evidence of a price rebound to justify widespread valuation increases yet.

"My job is to be fair," Morrissey said. "I call it like the market does."

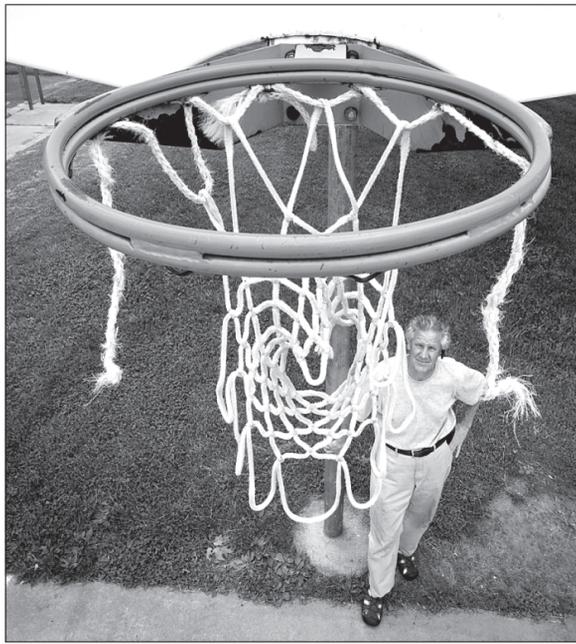
Morrissey's reading of real estate prices caused him to leave valuations unchanged for nearly three-quarters of existing single-family houses, according to a World-Herald analysis. Of those with changes, the majority had reductions.

In Sarpy County, nearly all valuations are tweaked each year. As in Douglas County, reductions far outnumbered increases, although valuation cuts tended to be smaller than in Douglas.

For both counties, the state of Nebraska determined that valuations on recently sold



Willow Wood residents complain that their 85 acres of green space don't look as good now as they did when the City of Omaha annexed the area in 2008. In Willow Wood Park East, near 120th and Blondo Streets, the grass was mowed the day before, but not all the weeds were removed.



Ben Menard eyes a tattered basketball net at a park in his Willow Wood subdivision. Stagnant or shrinking valuations often force spending cuts.

homes were about 96 percent of market value — right in the middle of the range allowed by the state.

Some of the largest Sarpy reductions were in established neighborhoods in the Bellevue area. In some places more than 90 percent of homeowners will see valuation cuts.

Similarly, Douglas County reduced valuations in older communities such as Florence, Keystone and Benson — as well as long-standing suburban neighborhoods such as Willow Wood and Millard Highlands.

Not every valuation went down in those areas. For example, Menard's house in Willow Wood went up \$5,500, perhaps because he added a deck.

But nine out of 10 of his

neighbors are seeing cuts. That includes Kathy Burns, the homeowners association president. Last year she protested her valuation and won a \$5,600 reduction. Now the county has cut her valuation an additional \$11,000, dropping her to \$120,500.

That's a little disconcerting to see, she said, because she paid nearly \$136,000 for the house in 2006.

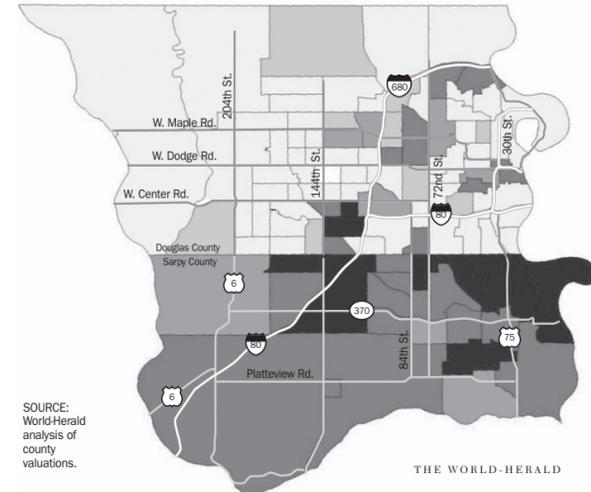
"It's a good thing for my taxes, but that doesn't speak well for the neighborhood," she said, adding that she hopes the housing market recovers by the time she needs to sell her house.

Burns and Menard said their concern isn't just that houses are bringing lower prices these days. It's that the housing crisis led to more Willow Wood houses

VALUATION CUTS VARY ACROSS DOUGLAS, SARPY

In many Douglas County neighborhoods, relatively few house valuations went down this year. But in some Douglas neighborhoods — and throughout most of Sarpy — the majority of houses received valuation cuts.

Percentage of houses with reduced valuations
 0 to 19% 20 to 39% 40 to 59% 60 to 79% 80% or more



SOURCE: World-Herald analysis of county valuations. THE WORLD-HERALD

being converted into rentals, which tend to be less well-maintained than owner-occupied dwellings.

They estimated that 10 percent of the neighborhood's houses now are in the hands of landlords, making it important for neighborhood leaders to keep alert for code violations and rentals with too many tenants.

Meanwhile, Willow Wood residents complain that their 85 acres of green space, including three parks, don't look as good now as they did when the City of Omaha annexed the area in 2008.

"There's no fertilizer, no weed control," Menard said. "It's been four years, and it looks like hell."

Menard said he's somewhat resigned to the fact that the city won't provide the same level of care as before the annexation. Everyone knew that the subdivision's 1970s layout, with twisting streets, dead-end circles and vast common areas behind houses, represented a maintenance challenge for the city.

But that design is part of the neighborhood's appeal to Menard, because it provides open space and a street maze that discourages drive-through traffic.

"It's difficult to get out of Willow Wood if you don't know how," he said. "Nobody comes into Willow Wood to take a shortcut."

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