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NeFU Asks Voters to Say NO to Ricketts Family Political Machine

LINCOLN, NE —Nebraska Farmers Union (NeFU) announces today that given the massive amounts of money totaling $26.97 million the last five years the Ricketts Family has spent influencing and controlling the outcome of a wide range of local, regional, and state offices, ballot issues, county and state Republican political organizations, and Nebraska-based federal offices, the Ricketts Family meets the technical definition of a "political machine." According to Britannica, a political machine is a party organization led by a small autocratic group that commands enough votes to maintain political and administrative control over a city, county, or state with a boss at the top.

NeFU President John Hansen said "As a state and engaged citizens, are we good with letting our state be run by a political machine? If not, it's time to reject one-party boss rule and change the channel when we're being bombarded by TV and radio ads between now and Election Day that are distorting and lying about candidates, especially Dan Osborn. Most Nebraskans are shocked by the flood of money contributed by the Ricketts family to influence and control elections in Nebraska. Our friends in other states don't tolerate political machines and they're asking us why is Nebraska putting up with it? We think most Nebraskans do not want their state controlled by a political machine. Ahead of the mid-term general election on Tuesday, November 3rd, we want to share our preliminary research findings with voters."

According to NeFU research of Nebraska Accountability and Disclosure Commission (NADC) report filings, from January 1, 2021 to October 24, 2026, the Ricketts family – former governor and current U.S. Senator Pete, founder of TD Ameritrade Joe, his wife Marlene, and daughter Laura, have spent over $14 million on candidates, ballot initiatives and state and county Republican parties. That number just includes known, reported funding to the NADC and does not count the millions of dark money PAC spending.

NeFU says the over $14 million does not include the $7.3 million Pete Ricketts has spent on his current U.S Senate campaign, the $650,000 Joe Ricketts gave to the America First Action Fund which is backing Pete Rickett for U.S. Senate. According to Bloomberg News, the Senate Leadership Fund has publicly committed to spending $15 million supporting Pete's re-election, $5 million of which came from Joe Ricketts, bringing the total to nearly $27 million on Nebraska-based campaigns in the last 5 years.

Marlene Ricketts spent the most – over $10 million – mostly on committees for ballot initiatives for voter ID and against abortion. She has not reported anything this two-year election cycle with the last contributions in October 2024. Joe Ricketts's contributions of $355,000 were to the Nebraska Republican Party, the PAC that formed to oppose Charles Herbster and Brett Lindstrom in the governor primary in 2022, and this election cycle for Don Kleine for Douglas County Attorney and Aaron Hanson for Douglas County Sheriff. Laura, sister of Pete, gave $20,000 to Susanna Shore's campaign for Board of Regents, who is Senator Pete Ricketts' wife.

Senator Ricketts has given over $3 million in the last 5 years to a wide variety of races, including to candidates running for the Legislature, city councils, county commissions, sheriff, mayor, learning communities, MUD, state board of education, city boards of education, board of regent, public service commission, county attorney, Southeast Community College board of governors, Regional Metro Transit

Authority of Omaha board of directors, and OPPD board, as well as to county Republican parties, the state Republican party, and ballot initiatives on voter ID and abortion.

From 2021 to 2025, Pete Ricketts gave $252,500 to 16 sitting members of the Legislature – Senators Bob Andersen, Robert Clements, Stan Clouse, Robert Dover, Bob Hallstrom, Rick Holdcroft, Kathleen Kauth, Loren Lippincott, Dan Lonowski, Glen Meyer, Rita Sanders, Tony Sorrentino, Jared Storm, Tanya Storer, Paul Strommen, and Brad von Gillern. This does not include past senators and candidates for 2026.

In 2026, Senator Pete Ricketts has given $600,000 to Nebraska campaigns. On May 1st, he gave $3,000 to the Keith County Republican Party which is where Democratic senate candidate alleged Ricketts "plant" William Forbes resides. On Sep. 5, he gave $15,000 to Ben Houchin for Lancaster County Sheriff, who has been accused domestic violence by his ex-wife. Mostly recently on Oct. 24, he gave $135,000 to the state Republican party, the largest contribution made to them in recent years.

"Thanks to the U.S. Supreme Court Citizens United v Federal Election Commission ruling, campaign spending limits were wiped out. While it is not illegal for billionaires or the Ricketts family to invest virtually unlimited amounts of money in campaigns to influence elections, we believe it should be. Senator Ricketts will never support Congressional efforts to undue the Citizens United ruling," said Vern Jantzen, NeFU Vice President and Chair of the NeFU PAC. "The current system favors the rich and powerful at the expense of our democracy. Political machines are not good for our democracy," he said.

"The Ricketts family uses their money and power to buy more money and power that could be used to help cure diseases or help people without means to feed their families or meet their health care needs. No matter how much political influence and control the Ricketts family have, they want more. Massive amounts of money undermine the function of our elections. Most voters connect the links between political machines and nonstop negative attack ads on TV for months. While the Ricketts family complains about outside money impacting Nebraska elections, they are very comfortable as long as they are the ones impacting the elections," Hansen continued.

"These numbers we crunched do not include past dark-money negative attack ads which have gone after incumbent senators such as Al Davis, Les Seiler, and Jerry Johnson as well as challengers Tom Brandt and Myron Dorn to Ricketts-backed candidates. Nor do these numbers count the fundraising work that Todd Ricketts has done as the former finance chair for the RNC. All told, the Ricketts family has exerted enormous influence on state and federal politics and have brought us extreme right policies, candidates, and public officials," said NeFU executive director Matthew Gregory.

"NeFU calls on voters to reject candidates and ballot initiatives bought and controlled by the Ricketts Political Machine. We cannot stop the Ricketts political machine from spending their money to influence how we vote, but we as voters can choose to ignore their efforts. Our PAC board believes that farmers and voters in general should vote their pocketbook interests. We stay the course as voters when our lives are going in positive directions. When our lives, farms, and family budgets are in the tank, we need to make changes. We are facing the worst farm crisis since the 1980s and our Congress has failed to pass an updated Farm Bill for the past three years. Urban and rural families alike are suffering from too much big business and ideologically extreme policies. It is time for a change. Let our votes send that message. We can stop digging the hole we are in deeper. Enough is enough," Hansen concluded.

Nebraska Farmers Union is a general farm organization with 4,000 farm and ranch family members dedicated to protecting and enhancing the economic well-being and quality of life for family farmers and ranchers, and their rural communities. Since 1913, Nebraska Farmers Union has helped organize over 445 cooperatives.

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