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**Notice of a Gretna Citizens' Meeting and upcoming town hall meetings:
An Opportunity to Defend the right to representation
and Defend Local Control Throughout Nebraska**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GRETNA, Neb. – Citizens for a Free Nebraska (CFN) will be holding a town hall meeting at the Gretna Legion Hall on Thursday evening to explain the importance for the citizens of Gretna to take action to preserve the independence of their City and of all the cities in Sarpy County before Omaha develops the ability to annex into other counties. The town hall meeting will be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 8th.

Among CFN officials and other guest speakers at the meeting will be Tim Gilligan, Mayor of Gretna, Phil Klein, former Mayor of Elkhorn, and Skip Wolff, Mayor of Bennington.

CFN is currently circulating two statewide initiative petitions. If the effort is successful, the petitions would place two laws on the statewide ballot for voters to decide whether or not they will be enacted: one would prohibit the takeover of any city or village in Nebraska without a majority vote of its citizens and the other would allow the citizens of any city or village that has been annexed to petition to detach and reestablish as an independent city within five years. The full text of the statutes can be found on their website, www.freenebraska.net.

The State of Nebraska is the only state in the Union that allows one municipality to take over another without a vote of the citizens, and CFN says that it intends to correct that. "What is the fear in allowing the people to vote? Who fears that, in the United States of America, the principles of its own Constitution would be put into action? The answer is obvious: those who fear the voice of the citizens are those who do not truly represent them," Fuller said.

The citizens of Nebraska have the prerogative to act as the state's second legislative body and enact laws through the petitioning process. Through a statewide effort of gathering about 80,000 signatures (seven

percent of the registered voters in the state), the people could bring the issue to the ballot this year and enact the laws being proposed by CFN.

Among other topics that will be discussed at the meeting, CFN will explain the importance for the citizens to take immediate action to defend their right to independence before Omaha develops the ability to annex across county lines. And that ability, they say, is not only possible, but is an inevitability. Jason Fuller, an organizer of CFN, explained that, "there is no law that prohibits annexation across county lines. That 'rule' comes from an outdated 1960's court case - a court case that only denied annexation across county lines due to 1960's issues such as sharing paperwork and services. All that it would take for Omaha to annex into Sarpy County and other counties today would be for it to test the issue on a small piece of land in another county and obtain a new ruling from an 'agreeable' judge."

Tom Fencil, another organizer of CFN, added that, "co-mingling of funds between Omaha and Sarpy County already exists through the fire districts. The Omaha Fire Department is already providing coverage to parts of Sarpy County because it has agreements with the Millard Fire District that extend into Sarpy County, and Omaha will more than likely use that in its defense."

Omaha officials continue to state that they have no intention of annexing across county lines. However, CFN believes that couldn't be further from the truth. Fuller argues that, "yes, Omaha officials have stated that they have no intention of attempting to annex across county lines, but I also remember when Omaha officials stated that they had no intention of annexing the City of Elkhorn. And even now, they continue to state that they have no intention of annexing the City of Bennington, yet one only needs to look at the current maps provided by the Douglas County Assessor and take note of Omaha's recent growth toward Bennington to see what's really going on. Omaha's intention to annex the City of Bennington is obvious and undeniable." Maps that show Omaha's recent growth toward Bennington can be found on the "downloads" page of CFN's website, www.freenebraska.net.

"Furthermore," Fuller said, "according to testimony entered by the City of Omaha in the trial against the City of Elkhorn, Omaha said that it must be allowed to continue to expand, or it will die. So, according to testimony given under oath, it follows that Omaha officials believe that their city will 'die' when it reaches the borders of

Douglas County. So, what then, can they do? What then, must they do? I suppose that they will continue to profess their lies and give false assurances while they prepare to seize control.”

Other cities in Sarpy County, like Papillion and La Vista, have populations over the current 10,000 population threshold at which point, according to current statutes, they are protected from annexation by Omaha regardless of whether or not it develops the ability to annex across county lines. But, CFN argues that the population threshold for annexation, defined by the Legislature, is an arbitrary value and could easily be changed to allow Omaha to annex those cities as well. “The 10,000 population threshold is an arbitrary threshold, defined by the Legislature, and could easily be changed with the stroke of a pen; there is no reason for the number to remain 10,000, and there is no reason that it couldn’t be 50,000 or 200,000. Annexation of a city of over 10,000 citizens could easily be made possible and should be defended against while the citizens still have the power to defend themselves. Our proposed statutes would take care of the arbitrary thresholds by simply requiring a vote of the citizens before annexation of any city or village can occur,” said Fuller.

Another issue that CFN is contending with is trying to defend cities and villages from the growing possibility of city-county mergers and multiple-county mergers. Fencil asserted that, “under current law, once any municipal county is formed through city-county merger, its governing body would eventually be able to take control over all of the cities in its territory, regardless of how big they are or whether or not they were even contiguous with the city that originally merged with the county. So, if Omaha became a municipal county, it would no longer have to go after one city at a time. If your city is in Douglas or any of the surrounding Counties, it won’t matter how big or how far away your city is when the City of Omaha becomes the Municipal County of Omaha and decides that it wants to merge with your county as well. And, the second that Omaha annexes even one square inch into Sarpy County or any other county, its zoning jurisdiction would automatically be extended three miles further into that county and it would immediately become the largest city of that county, making it much easier for it to take control.” Fuller added that, “the possibility exists for Omaha to not only take control of cities in multiple counties, but for it to actually take control of multiple counties, themselves. The citizens need to take action to defend their cities now, before that happens. And city-county mergers are a statewide issue because any county in Nebraska can become a municipal county.”

The laws proposed by CFN would protect cities and villages from municipal counties and multiple county mergers by guaranteeing the citizens a right to vote before they could be annexed by a municipal county.

CFN also believes that its efforts are of statewide importance, and according to CFN, two of the most important issues that all Nebraskans should consider are the balance of power in the Nebraska State Legislature and the diminishing of western representation. Fuller stated that, “among other statewide issues, perhaps one of the most dire is that the Nebraska Legislature is now reaching a point where, due to Omaha’s current ability to make forced annexations of its neighbors and gobble up legislative districts, Omaha will soon gain enough power over the Legislature to force the state to funnel tax dollars directly into its fiscally irresponsible projects and comply with its every whim.”

“As only a small example of what’s coming,” Fencil said, “during a state of the city address, Omaha Mayor Mike Fahey asked that the state ‘recognize all of the economic benefits’ of Omaha’s convention center, and for it to ‘reimburse [Omaha] with its fair share,’ because Omaha is not able to manage the expenses of the projects that it starts. And, with their increasing control of the Legislature, it won’t be long until they are simply able to demand it. Big ticket-items like baseball stadiums, trolley car systems, and sewer replacement projects don’t come cheap, but Omaha isn’t all that concerned and continues to spend recklessly because when funding comes from the state, everyone pays.”

CFN invites all citizens of Nebraska who wish to know more about the local and statewide implications of their efforts to attend one of their upcoming town hall meetings, ask questions, and visit their website, www.freenebraska.net.

In an effort to inform the citizens of the issues and to also gain volunteers, CFN is working to schedule town hall meetings for the citizens of Papillion, La Vista, Bellevue, Springfield, Valley, Waterloo, Yutan, Fort Calhoun, Blair, Fremont, and others in the Omaha and Lincoln areas over the next few weeks.

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