

# Martin may face tough '74 opposition

John  
Vihstadt  
different  
drummer

Nebraska's third Congressional district (comprising 3 per cent of the state's voters, but three-quarters of its land) has been represented in Washington since 1961 by Rep. Dave Martin. And conventional political wisdom has it that the Kearney native possesses a safe seat for as long as he wants it.

After all, in six re-election victories his margin has never dipped below 60 per cent. Further, the district is prime Republican territory—a sprawling 61-county prairie dotted by small towns and family farms and populated by God-fearing folks who make their living close to the land. Democrats, even ones like Gov. J.J. Exon and former Gov. Frank Morrison, are viewed with deep suspicion.

Too, Martin's credentials within his Republican party appear impeccable. He presided as the Nebraska GOP state chairman during the first great Eisenhower victory and now is a member of the Republican leadership hierarchy in the House of Representatives.

Yet for 1974, Martin is preparing to undergo what could prove the strongest re-election challenge of his career.

First, he must clear the hurdle of Republican opposition in the May state primary—something he never before has had to bother with. Jack Langford, Buffalo County GOP chairman, has decided to take on the state's senior Congressman, and his drive is picking up momentum. Langford's strong party contacts will serve him well in lining up influential support, and his ultraconservative political views are capturing the attention of the district's voters.

If Martin is renominated, his Democratic opponent in the general election almost is certain to be former State Sen. Wayne Ziebarth of Wilcox. Ziebarth, who finished unexpectedly strong behind Terry Carpenter and Wallace Peterson in the 1972 Democratic senatorial primary, is a folksy politician with a wide name recognition—something not possessed by Martin's previous Democratic challengers, including such notables as William Colwell, John Homah

and J.B. Dean. (Remember them?)

Moreover, he surely would benefit from Exon's coattails in what could well be a very strong Democratic year.

Still, if the breaks come Martin's way, he should be able to return to Capitol Hill. He certainly deserves to.

By virtue of his high seniority and near-top position on the powerful House Rules Committee, he is able to accomplish much more for Nebraska than could someone with lesser experience.

His expert leadership in the critical areas of agriculture, rural development, small business, conservation and public power is of special relevance to the region's voters. Over the years, he has secured countless grants for health facilities and educational institutions from Grand Island to Scottsbluff.

Republican voters would be doing themselves a disservice by replacing Martin with a man of reactionary tendencies whose thinking is outside the GOP mainstream. An experienced, pragmatic and sensible conservative of known dedication and industry must not be swapped for a political gadfly out on an ego trip.

Third district citizens also need to be wary of Ziebarth, who has managed to get where he is today by money, publicity and well-placed friends. While serving on the Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, he attempted to politicize the supposedly nonpartisan group by infesting it with Democratic cronies. Ziebarth would be a poor advertisement for Nebraska in contrast to Martin and his prominent record of action and achievement.

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In a related development, UNL student Blane Osterman reportedly has signed on with the Ziebarth campaign staff. It is doubtful how much he will be able to help his idol, however. Osterman himself has lost elections for leadership posts in campus Young Democrats and the Residence Hall Assoc.

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