

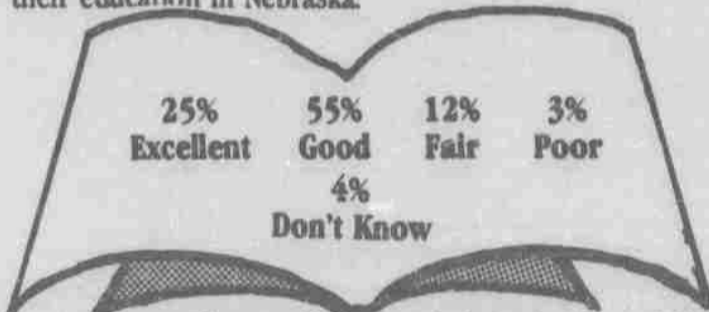
Urban Life: The Good Life?

The Sower atop Lincoln's state Capitol once presided over a few thousand businesses and homes — some were nearly farms. Now Lincoln bumps friendly elbows with their neighbors — Prairie Home, Cheney, Denton, Alvo, Eagle.

Substantial growth brings substantial problems. But Lincoln seems to have kept pace with those problems, at least in the eyes of some of her residents.

A random poll conducted by The Sower magazine contacted 200 Lincoln residents — equal percentages by telephone prefix. Respondents evaluated "the good life" in Lincoln. And their reaction was, overall, positive. Of those respondents who had received health care in Lincoln, 85 percent rated their care excellent or good. More than 86 percent said they felt secure in their homes and on their streets, and evaluated the quality of law enforcement as excellent or good.

The graph below indicates respondents' evaluation of their education in Nebraska.



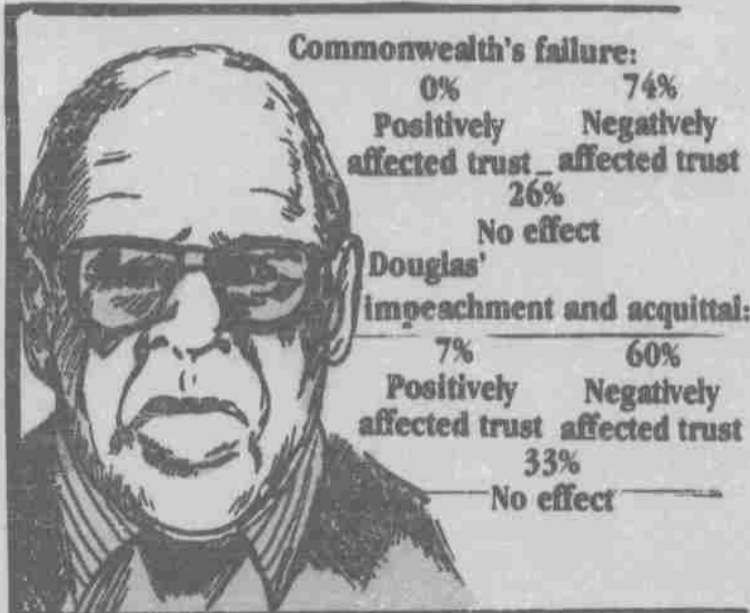
Lincoln residents polled overwhelmingly favored their environments for attractiveness and cleanliness. More than 92 percent rated their neighborhoods excellent or good.

Ann Lowe spent a Saturday with people in their neighborhoods. Story, Page 3.

Nebraskans were shaken when the failure of Commonwealth Savings Co. in Lincoln seemed to spur a chain of smaller bank failures and bank mergers.

Then, State Attorney General Paul Douglas was impeached for his connection with Commonwealth's failure, and subsequently acquitted.

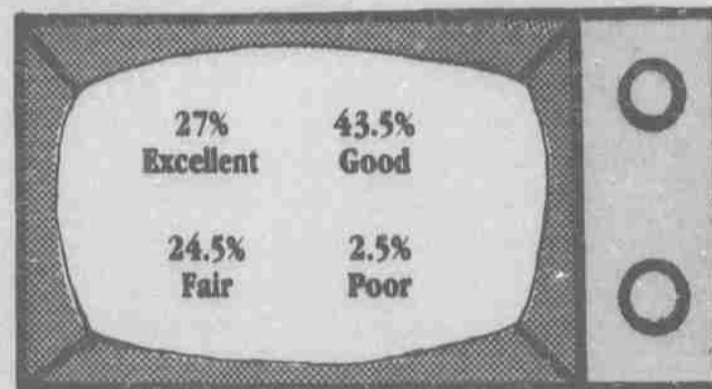
Poll respondents evaluated the impact of both events on their trust in financial institutions, and in Nebraska's state government. The following graphs illustrate their response.



Sen. John DeCamp is chairman of the Legislature's banking committee. One of the most powerful and experienced legislators Nebraskans have ever elected to office, DeCamp is also one of the most difficult to get a handle on. Jeff Browne spent a day with "John D.," the Wiz of the Legislature. Story, Page 5.

Suzanne Teten traveled to Grand Island to see how the Third City's economy and people are faring. Story, Page 4.

Lincoln residents were split on their views of Lincoln's culture and leisure activities.



Ann Lowe talked to the leader of one group of Lincoln residents trying to improve one aspect of their cultural opportunities. Mel Dahl has found a church for homosexuals. Story, Page 6.

Respondents also were divided on the issue of discrimination: 42.5 percent said they were regularly discriminated against on the basis of age, race, religion or sex — while 54.5 percent said they were not regularly discriminated against.

More than 90 percent of black respondents said they were regularly discriminated against. Ward W. Triplett III found this high percentage may be attributed to Nebraska's institutional racism. Story, Page 7.

Comparing the good with the bad, respondents still cast Lincoln in a favorable light.



Life experience overall:

Of those rating Nebraska's good life as only fair, 84 percent were unemployed residents. Judi Nygren examines the unemployment picture in her story, this page.

—Mona Z. Koppelman

Metropolis, we ain't got. Nebraskans don't have to worry about King Kong climbing up the Capitol, no Golden Gate for Godzilla to grind up — no killer tomatoes ever attacked Lincoln.

Nebraska's city dwellers do face many of the same problems that other city folk face: pollution, rising crime rates, unemployment, urban growth, suburban sprawl, inner city deterioration.

But Omaha, Lincoln and the rest of Nebraska's cities still maintain a truly Midwestern character. They are hybrids: urban environments forged from fertile soil, cattle yards, river trade, railroad lines, state government, salt mines, skilled labor and that "work ethic."

State statistics deceive; jobless numbers still high

Nebraska's September unemployment rate, 3.7 percent, registered slightly higher than 1984's low point, but remained lower than most rates recorded in the last six years.

From 1978 to 1983, the state battled unemployment rates as high as seven percent. Then in January 1984, it fell into the five percent range, raising Nebraskan's hopes for an economic recovery.

As unemployment rates continued to fall each month — reaching a low of 3.4 percent in August — the state's hopes appeared to verge on reality. But figures can be deceiving, according to experts.

Nebraska's unemployment rate is down because of recovery in Omaha and Lincoln, not because of a state-wide recovery, according to the Nebraska Department of Labor's research. Within Omaha and Lincoln, manufacturing and business hiring is up. Unemployment rates in other cities still look bleak.

This contrast results from different economic bases, according to the labor department.

Omaha and Lincoln have "diverse" economic bases which depend more on manufacturing than agriculture, said Mike Butler, of the labor department. This diversity has allowed the two cities to remain "fairly insulated" from the state's agriculture slump, he said.

But the effects of the agricultural recession have seeped into the cities' economies. Butler said the state's dependence on agriculture keeps Lincoln, and Omaha on the tail end of the national recovery. Even though Omaha's and Lincoln's unemployment rates continue to go down, agricultural communities' unemployment rates creep up as winter sets in, he said.

To ease Nebraska's dependence on agriculture, Gov. Bob Kerrey has traveled the world, trying to draw new businesses into the state. His push to attract companies specializing in telecommunications has been met with mixed reviews, but Butler said it has helped the state.

Even though recovery in Lincoln and Omaha is more advanced than in most Nebraska cities, the cities are not without employment problems.

According to Jerry Deichert, research associate at UNL's Bureau of Business Research, the last few months' decline in unemployment is more a result of many people leaving the cities' work forces, than of a strong employment situation.

For example, 12,000 people in September were dropped from the state's unemployment roster. This was because 12,000 people found jobs in Nebraska — only 4,000 new employees went to work. But 8,000 people left the work force. This shift in the work force is happening in Omaha and Lincoln, as well he said.

The apparent "rosy" employment picture is further tarnished, Butler said, when people look beyond employment statistics and examine the type of jobs people are settling for.

People with college degrees and work experience are working in fast-food restaurants and part-time jobs, hoping that something better will come along, Butler said. He called this situation *underemployment*.

Taking part-time and low-skill jobs solves adult workers problems temporarily, he said — but it leaves teenagers and students without jobs.

—Judi Nygren