

Commissioner Charlie Knapper Pushes Back on Recall: Cites Record of Transparency and Taxpayer Wins

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Commissioner Charlie Knapper is speaking out against what he describes as a personally motivated recall effort designed to invalidate his efforts to provide transparency and accountability at Scotts Bluff County.

“The recall petitioner states he wants restoration of trust and transparency in county government. Ironically, it is my transparency and demand for accountability that has incited my detractors to seek a recall,” Knapper said. “Ask the constituents who have engaged with me; I am accessible and transparent.”

“I’m the same guy who stood on your doorstep and asked for your vote in 2018 and again in 2022. You and I were upset at the current state of county operations. We’ve made tremendous improvements, yet we’re still correcting board actions made before 2018. I plan to stay until those are resolved,” Knapper said.

“In Nebraska, elected officials can be recalled for any reason, even falsehoods,” he continued. “The petitioner, his neighbor, and a brood of others want to make this personal. Several are willing to slander and libel me, but are unwilling to debate ideas with me. I’m up for re-election in less than a year. Why make the taxpayers pay for a special election now?”

The recall petitioner claims Knapper violated county bylaws, a charge he says is factually impossible since no such bylaws exist. “We don’t have bylaws. We are governed by state law, and no laws have been broken,” he said.

Another accusation alleges he backdated and falsified HR documents, which Knapper calls another impossibility. “No HR documents have been backdated or falsified. HR documents are protected from tampering by the Personnel Director. The parties involved in personnel matters understand the context of the documents in question. Interpretation of these documents by third parties is inappropriate,” Knapper said.

Since taking office, Commissioner Knapper has spearheaded substantial fiscal reform. He led efforts to reduce the county mill levy from 42.22 cents to 36.7 cents—the lowest level since 2002. This accomplishment came despite the weight of four outstanding bonds issued by previous county boards, which still account for 5% of the current levy. “I have successfully opposed taking on new debt, we cash flow everything,” Knapper stated. Addressing early concerns from voters in his 2018 campaign, Knapper has overseen a number of operational improvements.

Commissioner salaries have remained flat during his tenure.

Prior to 2019, the County Jail consistently missed federal and state revenue projections by nearly \$1 million annually, contributing to staffing issues and budget constraints felt across the county. Commissioners and Sheriff Overman stabilized jail operations almost immediately in 2019.

The Roads and Weed Departments were consolidated to better align with seasonal work needs. Road maintenance and equipment purchases have transitioned from debt financing to cash payments.

The Mapping Department was merged into the Assessor's Office to streamline county operations.

Knapper also took a strategic approach to the \$6.9 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds received by Scotts Bluff County. Unlike other jurisdictions that used the funds for one-time employee bonuses or electric vehicle charging stations, Knapper prioritized long-term taxpayer savings.

Under his leadership, the funds were used to construct a fleet fueling station to allow bulk fuel purchases, repair and replace aging bridges, and modernize HVAC systems and backup generators at county facilities.

"When we learned the county was receiving \$6.9 million from the federal government, I recommended we develop a mission statement to guide our spending. That mission statement said we must spend the money in a manner that would save 'future tax dollars,'" Knapper said.

With core operations stabilized, Knapper shifted focus to tourism in recent years, which he describes as the county's greatest untapped economic engine. "Public art is valuable, unfortunately, murals and statues don't fill hotel rooms. Events do," he said.

He emphasized the need to diversify tourism assets, by creating youth sports tournaments, concerts, and other activities that drive economic activity. He also noted that responsible use of lodging tax revenue can lead to increased retail and restaurant sales, ultimately helping cities reduce their reliance on property taxes.

"I'm passionate about tourism and the economic opportunities it presents. We need to spend lodging tax revenue strategically, consider the return on investment, and make data-based decisions," he said.

Commissioner Knapper urged voters to consider the motives behind the recall effort.

“Those petitioning for my recall have personal or financial interests tied to current tourism allocations and the rejected Situla Energy solar project. Some are county employees who don’t want transparency and efficiency coming to their office.” he stated. “I remain focused on what matters: efficient government, taxpayer value, and data-based decision-making for Scotts Bluff County.”

He encouraged voters to reach out directly with questions or concerns. “If you speak to one of my detractors, ask if they’ve discussed their concerns with me. If you talk to one of the other commissioners, be sure to talk to each of them. I have always made myself available and encouraged community members to reach out.”

Knapper encourages those with questions or concerns to call him at 308.641.9056.